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The Situation Of The Church In Enslaved Lithuania

Moscow Boasts

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The Information Bulletin of the Soviet Embassy in Washington (April 30), in its "Notes on Soviet Life," describes the alleged freedom of religion in Lithuania:

> The position of the Roman Catholic Church in Soviet Lithuania was described in a recent statement by the Most Reverend Mgr. Reinis, Catholic Archbishop of Vilnius.
>
> "The Catholic Church enjoys perfect freedom in Soviet Lithuania," he told a Tass correspondent. "The local authorities are assisting us in restoring and repairing churches destroyed by the German invaders, and supplying building materials. Our clergy are provided with all necessities.
>
> "There are at present two archbishoprics in Lithuania," Mgr. Reinis went on to explain, "those of Vilnius and Kaunas. The Catholic Church organization has remained unchanged. All 711 churches are functioning with their staffs of 1,332 clergy. The Kaunas Ecclesiastical Seminary, headed by the prominent theologian Ventuku, is graduating scores of young Catholic priests annually. Thousands of believers in Vilnius, Kaunas and other towns and villages gather as usual at Matins and Vespers. All established holidays are observed by the Church."

The Reality

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Before the Russian aggression in 1940, there were 6 dioceses in Lithuania (Archbishoprics of Vilnius and Kaunas, Bishoprics of Kaišiadorys, Panevėžys, Telšiai and Vilkaviškis) and the Klaipėda-Memel Prelacy. Lithuania had three archbishops and seven bishops, including one for the armed forces. There were four theological seminaries (Vilnius, Kaunas, Telšiai and Vilkaviškis) with 850 divinity students. There were Catholic and Protestant Theology-Philosophy Faculties in the Kaunas University, and a goodly number of private denominational high schools and other institutions of learning. A Catholic Academy of Arts and Sciences functioned and a Catholic University was in the process of formation. There were 800 parishes, with about 900 churches and chapels, 1,600 priests, and numerous convents, monasteries and congregations.

000 AND NOW? . . .

The Soviet Bulletin gives the latest statistics: "The Catholic Church organization has remained unchanged . . . 711 churches . . . 1,332 clergy . . . The Kaunas Ecclesiastical Seminary . . . two archbishoprics."

The Soviet Embassy conveniently omits the information regarding the fate of the bishops (of whom only three are probably in the country), the three missing seminaries, 300 priests, and the introduction of *numerus clausus* for divinity students: 150 for a nation of three million. . . The following article by a prominent Catholic layman, a university professor who lived through both Russian occupations and is now a refugee in Germany, will demonstrate bolshevik

tactics in combatting religion.

Soviet Methods

Dr. Ladas Natkevičius, the late Lithuanian Minister to the Kremlin, was asked by Stalin in 1939, during the so-called "negotiations for a Mutual Assistance Pact," how great was the influence of the clergy in Lithuania. When he was told that the clergy of all Christian denominations enjoy great authority among the faithful, the Generalissimo thoughtfully remarked —"That is *very important to know.*"

At the time the remark passed unnoticed. A Soviet invasion was not anticipated because of the frequently professed Soviet friendship for Lithuania and Lithuania's excellent record in discharging all treaty obligations.

But the significance of this remark was quite apparent when Justas Paleckis, the puppet "president of Soviet Lithuania," bade farewell to Dr. Hildebrandt, a noted German newspaperman. Paleckis told the departing German quite frankly that he had received instructions from the Supreme Soviet of the U.S.S.R. to apply no *direct* pressure on the clergy.

The Soviet regime always fought religion and its institutions, but its tactical methods were different during both occupations.

The First Occupation—Oppression at Full Tempo

Immediately after the first total occupation of the Baltic States in June 1940, uniform steps were applied by the three satraps of the Kremlin dispatched to liquidate the sovereign Republics: Vice-Commissar for Foreign Affairs Dekanozov in Lithuania, Deputy-Commissar for Foreign Affairs Vyshynsky in Latvia and Politbureau member Zhdanov in Estonia. The Concordats with the Vatican were abruptly and unilaterally broken off and the Papal Nunzios were expelled.

Then followed the elimination of religion from public life. The Catholic and Protestant Theology-Philosophy Faculties of the University of Lithuania at Kaunas were closed; all Catholic cultural, educational and social welfare organizations, newspapers and publishing concerns were abolished and their properties confiscated; teaching of religion was eliminated from schools; army, school, hospital and prison chaplains were summarily dismissed; crucifixes and other religious insignia were removed from schools, courts and public places and desecrated.

Then came the application of the nationalization decree: buildings, landholdings, workshops, libraries, private hospitals and schools, orphanages, kindergar-

[423] tems and personal property owned by institutions and organizations of a religious character were sequestered. In nationalizing land, parishes were given only 3 hectares—although other landlords retained 30 hectares. Buildings owned by parishes and bishoprics, including episcopal residences and seminaries, libraries, printing shops, printed stocks of books were confiscated. Denominational grammar schools, high schools, orphanages, kindergartens and hospitals were converted into state institutions. The stocks of missals, hymnals, prayer-books, rosaries, religious pictures, and other religious articles found stored in book shops and retail stores were desecrated or destroyed.

The Soviets considered the clergy a separate "caste," antagonistic to the proletariat and, therefore, to be eliminated. The clergy as well as independent farmers (called '*kulaks*'), were oppressed economically; priests and "cult servants" were heavily taxed. For instance, a tolerated "proletarian" with a monthly income of 200 rubles paid 30 rubles monthly for living space assigned to him, while "cult servants" of the same income class paid 220 rubles monthly, and those with incomes of 350 rubles paid 388 rubles.

The Communist Party proposed to levy excessive license fees on churches, similar to motion picture house and cabaret assessments. The taxes depended on the size of the church. Such taxes were already imposed in the sections of Poland annexed to Russia—20,000 to 50,000 rubles. A commissar explained the policy to a pastor of a Lithuanian parish in eastern Lithuania which was annexed by Russia in 1939: "If you can't pay—close down your shop." Consequently, the churches were to be closed by degrees for nonpayment of taxes.

The Party also passed a decision to convert the centrally located Garrison Church of Kaunas into a "Revolutionary Museum." The Museum of Church Art was liquidated and its exhibits, the antique vestments, were used by Red Army troopers to polish their boots.

All that was public anti-religious action. The other phase, shrouded in secrecy, was directed against individual members of the clergy.

The Party instructed its agents to disrupt the internal discipline of churchmen, to enlist agent-informers among the clergymen, to antagonize priests against each other or to compromise them. NKGB Major Gladkov issued a secret directive dated 21 October 1940, directed to all county security chiefs, to institute unbroken surveillance of priests, church employees, friars and nuns, and to enlist students of upper classes for espionage on the private lives of the clergymen. "Remember that some of the priests are not provided for materially and are wavering in their ideological outlook." The secret order of 21 January 1941 directed particular attention to individual discontent and antagonism among members of religious organizations: advantage should be taken of such incidents to disrupt the organizations.

After digesting the reports of weakness exhibited by some individual priests, People's Commissar of Justice, Pranas Pakarklis, a native traitor, offered attractive offices to a number of priests, on condition that

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they discontinue holding Mass and stop the performance of other priestly duties. A number of priests were arrested and the NKVD attempted to enlist their services by threats and blackmail. Because of these methods, several priests consented—and, immediately after their release, fled abroad. Those refusing to become agents were imprisoned. Soon the number of prisoners grew as many friars, preachers and high school students heroically defended their faith.

The Russians initiated a campaign against religious *traditions*. They began by banning the traditional Corpus Christi processions in the streets. All Saints Day was declared to be a working day, and the authorities banned traditional services and mass visits to cemeteries on All Souls' Day. During Advent and Lent, the bolsheviks encouraged dancing, entertainment and anti-religious lectures. Good Friday and Holy Saturday, as well as the second day of Easter, were designated working days. Those failing to report for work on the second day of Easter were prosecuted. In general, at frequent intervals, ordinary Sundays were periodically declared to be working days, and Saturdays—days of rest.

The teaching of religion in schools was replaced by classes on biology and the Stalin constitution. Biological lectures popularized "Darwinism." The "science of constitution" was to popularize a "Soviet democracy" and its oft-varying shifts directed by party line. In place of religious sodalities and athletic groups, the bolsheviks attempted to form "*Komsomol*" (Communist Youth) nests directed by political instructors called "Komsorg." Religious sermons were replaced by anti-religious tirades in the communist-controlled press and at mass meetings. Attendance at such mass-meetings to hear blasphemies was made compulsory.

Churches kept open and functioning. However, attendants at religious services were terrorized. The Party posted uniformed and non-uniformed spies at church doors to observe and list the churchgoers. Attendance in church was a sufficient reason for dismissal from higher offices.

The anti-religious drive, growing in tempo, began to expand. When Bishops Brizgys and Ramanauskas called on Pozdniakov, the former Soviet Minister to Lithuania and at present the Kremlin's deputy satrap, to ask for the return of the premises of the Theological Seminary, the Russian attempted to "reason" with them. Pozdniakov stated that they should have no illusions: what had been accomplished in Russia in 20 years, will be achieved in Lithuania within two to three years by experienced administrators. Why should the Seminary "delude" young men? By the time they became priests, there would be no duties to perform—in Russia the priests already have nothing to do. . . .

Lithuanian Resistance to the Anti-Religious Drive

The Lithuanians had suffered much for religion—murder, imprisonment and exile to Siberia—during

2nAnonymous U-4 (no date)1947 RB5 Lithuanians RB5

798 771 the Tsarist Russian occupation. True to tradition, *resistance* against the anti-religious drive developed into a spontaneous and united movement. The defense of religion embraced even persons who had formerly neglected the church and seemed to be indifferent.

Churches were filled to capacity. A former female communist stated that the church was the only place where one could relax physically, without having to listen to the maddening bolshevik agitation.

Mass singing in churches became a new and precious experience—a plea for help from a persecuted and dying people.

[769] On All Souls' night, the cemeteries were filled with people. The Lithuanians followed their ancient tradition, they paid respect to their dead without priests, regardless of the fury of the Party Militia which arrested many in their mad rage.

On Sundays, declared to be working days, everyone, including civil servants and school children, went to church, knowing full well the penalty. In Prienai, students reporting to school on All Souls' Day found a scribbled message tacked on the door: "Stalin's constitution grants freedom of conscience, therefore believers need not attend classes"—so all the students went to church. Numerous arrests and dismissals from school followed.

Public prayers were a custom during the school year. Now, just as soon as the teachers left the classrooms, they were again recited.

The bishops did not dismiss former chaplains from their duties. Unable to teach the doctrines of the Church in schools, the chaplains transferred their pastoral activities, after classes, into churches and sacristies. The chaplain of Alytus organized a Retreat on Good Friday. To prevent attendance, the Communist Party ordered the faculty of the school to organize an anti-religious lecture on that date and ordered all students to attend the mass-meeting. The teachers and a few pupils showed up. A teacher related afterward: "A little girl sat in front of me during the harrangue reading a booklet in her lap. I was curious and looked over her shoulder. It was the national religious classic of Lent songs—*Graudûs Verksmai*."

The ecclesiastic authorities did not dismiss the students of the seminaries. As some students dispersed, new idealists replaced them. Divinity students lived privately and attended lectures in churches, sacristies and private quarters. The NKVD made preparations to foreclose all private religious instruction, but the war intervened.

727 661 The first Russian occupation lasted one year. Pozdniakov's prophecy of the Soviet regime achieving within a two-three year period the results gained by the anti-religious campaign in Russia during 20 years, did not materialize, because of the spontaneous and determined resistance.

However, a heavy blow was delivered to religious life in Lithuania during the one year: 10% of the priests were eliminated, forcibly separated from their people. Of these, 15 priests were brutally tortured and murdered, 9 were exiled to Siberia. The majority

727 661 of laymen active in Catholic Action were either murdered or exiled to Siberia. 40,000 Lithuanians were deported to Russia during that one lone year, and at least two-thirds of the number were Catholic Action members.

The Second Russian Occupation

659 798 626 As far back as 1942, Comrade Vyshynsky, Deputy Commissar of Foreign Affairs and Liquidator of the Democratic Latvian State, admitted to a foreign statesman that bolshevik tactics in the Baltic States were based on an erroneous policy: the method of violence and compulsion had been a mistake.

In July 1944, the Russians again invaded the Baltic States. However, there was no change in their policy or methods regarding religion: they permitted no Catholic organizations, press or instruction of religion in schools.

[702] The Salesian monastery at Skirsnemunė was encircled by the Red Army and all physically able friars were drafted into the Red Army.

Soon thereafter, the tactics regarding the clergy wavered. Soviet overlords attempted to maintain, to some extent, the propaganda thesis regarding the alleged existence of "freedom of religion" in the Soviet [874] Union. Only one Catholic Seminary, of the former four, was left in Lithuania, but divinity students, as other university students, were exempt from military duty. The number of divinity students was sharply limited to 150—for a Catholic nation of three million —instead of the previous 850.

This measure represented a lull in the anti-religious drive: religion was to be eliminated by other means, by mass deportations of the faithful and their replacement by Communist Russians, so that, in the words of comrade Pozdniakov, the priests would find no employment for their vocation, no audience to listen to them. By effecting the primary aim of the Soviet regime—the liquidation of the Lithuanian people—the secondary aim, that of abolishing religion, would be simultaneously achieved. This explains the change in tactics, not the basic aim.

Furthermore, the new "party line" sought not merely to leave the clergy untouched, but to use them for political interests of bolshevism, as is done in Russia with the Orthodox clergy. In 1946 the NKVD encountered great difficulty with armed Lithuanian guerrilla operations. The NKVD decided to use the bishops and clergy to break the fighters' will to wage war. The Ministry of Interior (NKVD-MVD) demanded that the bishops publish pastoral letters and in sermons condemn the armed resistance and urge an end to it.

The alien regime attempted to attain two purposes: to enlist the clergy's aid to further its plans, and to drive a wedge between the clergy and the fighting nation. However, the plan was too obviously underlined with "red" threads, and the bishops declined to do the NKVD bidding. When the NKVD threatened with repressions, one bishop frankly told the satraps: "It is all the same to me whether I live five more years or less—I shall not soil the authority of the Church."

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The Anti-Religious Drive Intensified

When the Church hierarchy refused to be drawn to the "party line," Russian tactics once more underwent a change and returned to the policy of outright oppression.

Half of the surviving bishops of Lithuania were arrested: Bishop Borisevičius of Telšiai, his Suffragan Bishop Ramanauskas, and Bishop Theophilius Matulionis of Kaišiadorys. The latter suffered his second martyrdom at the hands of the Russians: previously he had spent 12 years in Russian dungeons and slave labor camps until, in 1933, he was exchanged for a Soviet spy sentenced in Lithuania for subversive activities.

There are two versions regarding the fate of Bishop Borisevičius. Officially, he was sentenced to death. However, repatriated German prisoners of war state that they saw the bishop in a slave labor gang cutting timber in the Far East, together with several other Lithuanian Monsignori and priests.

The aged bishop of Vilkaviškis, Antanas Karosas, is now living in Marijampolė, retired from active duties. Archbishop Karevičius died soon after the second Russian invasion. Archbishop Romuald Jałbrzykowski of Vilnius was repatriated to Poland to administer the sections of the Vilnius Archbishopric left in a reduced Poland. Archbishop Skvireckas, Metropolitan of Lithuania, together with Bishop Brizgys of Kaunas and Co-Adjutor Bishop Podoliskis of Vilkaviškis, are in exile in Western Europe. Bishop Mečys Reinys of Vilnius, according to a *Tass* bulletin, is said to be alive in Vilnius. There is no information whatsoever regarding Bishop Paltarokas of Panevėžys. Mgr. Juodaitis is administering the Bishopric of Telšiai.

If Bishop Paltarokas is still living, only two bishops remain in Lithuania—20% of the pre-war hierarchy. Of course, this does not prevent *Tass* from claiming that "The Catholic Church organization has remained unchanged. . . ."

During the latter part of 1946, the Soviet press vilely attacked the Catholic Church and the clergy. Lithuanian priests were accused of supporting the guerrillas—"political bandits" and "Lithuanian-German nationalists." The NKVD instituted numerous prosecution processes against priests and gave the widest publicity to the charges. Priests were sentenced to 10 years in hard labor prisons and deported to Russia.

The terror, by the end of the year 1946, was greater than during the first occupation: 25 priests were murdered, 40 were sentenced to hard labor and deported, 150 priests are in hiding.

Through murders, imprisonment, deportations and exile, Lithuania has lost the services of at least 350 priests—that is, 22% of all priests in the country in 1940.

Bishop Ramanauskas of Telšiai went to the NKVD in Vilnius to inquire about the fate of his superior, Bishop Borisevičius. He was told that the Bishop was sentenced to death. He returned to Telšiai. He was arrested by the NKVD immediately after hold-

793 ing Holy Mass. With his hands tied behind his back, he was pushed into an auto, driven to the railroad
661 station, and placed on board a train.
798 Bishop Matulionis was arrested in mid-December 1946. The old martyr bore himself with dignity and firmness. To warnings by well-wishers he replied: "I know the bolsheviks." He had ordained some divinity graduates December 9 and 12th, and appeared very weak. He was arrested a few days later for having issued a pastoral letter warning against the wiles of Komsomol.

Arrests of the clergy are more numerous after several visits to "Prime Minister" Gedvila to protest against limiting the number of divinity students to 150. The seminary's building is being requisitioned: its quarters in Marian Fathers' Charity Church are being turned over to Nurses School.

A favorite Russian method is to promote dissension. When Rev. Nagulevičius, pastor of Obeliai, was arrested, the NKDV lodged a suspended priest in the rectory. This "pastor" refused to admit the priest appointed by the bishop. The Chancellor of the diocese arrived to settle the matter, but the NKVD "pastor" refused to obey. When the Chancellor visited comrade Gailevičius, Adviser on Cult Affairs in Vilnius, the latter said: "At present the people rule. This is apparently the people's will, and we cannot help in this matter."

The NKVD is attempting to install its own "priests" and, eventually, to have a Church administration subservient to the NKVD. Thus far, only one apostate is known.

No priests are admitted to the Klaipėda-Memel District.

[794] Congregations are being evicted from their quarters although, officially, the monasteries are not banned. St. Casimir's Sisters are still in possession at Pažaislis, and the Franciscan Fathers are still left in Kretinga.

[651] Priests and Church property are heavily taxed. For instance, the Cathedral of Kaunas must pay 46,000 rubles, the Cathedral of Panevėžys 40,000, the small Church of St. Nicholas in Vilnius dating back to the 14th century, is taxed 16,000 rubles. The late Mgr. Jokubauskas, administrator of the Bishopric of Kaunas who died in February 1947, was taxed 20,000 rubles. The figures become significant when it is realized that an average laborer earns 200 rubles a month.

Sidelights of Anti-Religious Drive

659 Religious practice is permitted inside the church
626 only: Stalin's constitution grants "freedom of belief"
798 and warrants the liberty of anti-religious propaganda. No religious texts, not even prayerbooks, are permitted to be published—"paper shortage" . . . On the other hand millions of vile pamphlets are printed.

Once more, uniformed sentinels and agents in mufti are ostentatiously posted at church doors. They look
[558] over every face and scribble notes in the "blocnotes." Attendance in church means dismissal from a responsible post in the government. Teachers attending religious services are denounced in the press as "persons of low morality." A high school director inquired of

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the Ministry of Education whether he could attend religious services. The reply was: "As an individual—yes, as a State employee—No."

Churches in the cities are crowded. In rural areas—the churches are nearly vacant. This is because people are afraid to leave their homes because of robberies and thefts by the Russians and Party members. On Sundays, even uniformed soldiers and militiamen (police) are openly engaging in robberies.

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A vigorous campaign against priests and the Vatican was instituted since December 1946. The Pope, the Vatican, and Christian morality and ways of life are vilely denounced. In 1947, the Vatican became the "cradle of international reaction": the button pressed in Moscow echoes everywhere under the Russian occupation.

Translators immediately put out literature in the Lithuanian language. *Tiesa*, the official organ of the Communist Party and "government," in its #45 issue denounced the institution of Papacy as a partner of imperialists and exploiters: "The Pope was partner of the gangs of Teutonic crusaders," "During World War II, the Pope supported Hitler, the worst enemy of the Lithuanian people," "the clergy are the worst exploiters and enemies of the people."

Christian morality is also abused but "bolshevik morality" (?) is praised. For instance, *Bolševikiniu Keliu* (On the Bolshevik Path, No. 6/12) of 28 February 1947 wrote:

"The working people of a socialist country are creating their own new morality, basically differing from religious morality. Our morality is based on the struggle for Communism. . . . Morality is the means for destroying the exploiting society and uniting the working people around the proletariat which is forming a new Communist society. Hatred for the oppressors and enslavers . . . these are the wonderful peculiarities of our morality."

Certainly, a remarkable resemblance to Nazi "morality". . . .

The people of Lithuania entertain no illusions: the publicity drive against religion presages a new wave of arrests and deportations and purges. Indeed, since February 1947 mass dismissals from State employment—and every concern is a State concern—began.

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The Lithuanian people met the second anti-religious drive with passive resistance, just as during the first occupation. The "purges" are met with heroic stoicism. Churches remain filled with the faithful, regardless of the "friendly reminders" by Communist overlords to avoid the "inconveniences" and "hardships." Religious conferences for school children go on in churches, and the Komsomol is boycotted. Anti-religious "lectures" are attended only under compulsion. Teachers support the Komsomol only under direct pressure. *Tiesa*, the Soviet official mouthpiece, voiced its concern (12 February 1947):

"Komsomol meetings in the II Gymnasium of Siauliai are infrequent. The Komsomol youths' attendance is deficient—a recent meeting was attended by only 5 members out of 13. We asked comrade Baravykaitė,

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798 a Komsomol girl, why her sister did not attend. She
771 blushed, did not dare to speak, finally she admitted:
883 'She is afraid.'

"—What do you mean, afraid?

"In the 4th Class there are 2 Komsomol members, but the influence of the reactionary Catholic clergy is very strong among the students of that class. The girls attend church and classes in religion arranged by the priests. Only members of the Komsomol do not attend, and they are persecuted for this reason.

"Reactionary Catholic clergymen built a strong nest in the II Gymnasium. They send out invitations to attend church where religion is taught to students. The teachers could not be unaware of this, yet they do nothing about it."

The Soviet mouthpiece recommended the purging of the teaching staff.

771 The Lithuanian People may suffer long martyrdom for Christianity. Nevertheless, they are encouraged by the sharpening ideological exchanges reflected in the Soviet press. They continue to sing with unfathomable emotion their classic religious hymn:

"Marija, Marija, skaisčiausia Lelija . . .
Palengvink vergiją, pagelbėk žmonijai,
Ilgelbėk nuo priešo baisaus . . .

"Oh, Mary, Mary, most immaculate Lily . . .
Ease enslavement, help humanity,
Save from the terrible enemy . . ."

800 If this struggle lasts much longer and the Lithuanians and the other Baltic peoples do not receive help from those who guaranteed to nations and to individuals freedom of worship, then the Baltic peoples will be exterminated. Only their unshakable loyalty to their religious convictions and to liberty, will remain as an example; perhaps to some, more sensitive souls—as a qualm of conscience.

What is taking place in Lithuania and the other Baltic States today is only a reproduction in miniature of the great ideological conflict which is shaking the world: the conflict of religion against anti-religion; a continuation of the conflict of democracy and freedom against totalitarianism and moral and physical slavery. As Mr. Alexander Clifford says in his very significant article in the continental edition of the "Daily Mail" (May 7, 1947): *"Make No Mistake, This Is War—A Holy War."*

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